

114 Prefixes

Prefixes are small groups of letters which can be added to the start of many words to give them different meanings.

See also:

Types of verbs 49

Singular and plural nouns 69 Adjectives 92

114.1 PREFIXES

Prefixes attach to the start of a word to change its meaning. Prefixes usually give the same change in meaning to each word they attach to.

im- = not

Polly thought her boss was very rude and **im**polite.



mis- = wrongly

Leona was worried that she had **mis**understood the recipe.



re- = again

Tom was **re**writing his essay because his teacher gave him a low grade.



un- = not

Jane is **un**likely to study history because she prefers science.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

This exercise is too hard.
It's completely **im**possible!



Brendan had **mis**placed his passport.
He couldn't find it anywhere.



I didn't work very hard this year.
I'll have to **re**take my exams.



Please clean up your desk.
It's very **un**tidy.



A fear of ghosts is totally **irr**ational, they don't exist!



You should go to see the new
exhibit. It's absolutely **out**standing.




114.2 USING PREFIXES

Some words can take more than one kind of prefix to give different meanings.

The fish is **cooked** perfectly. It's delicious! 

The fish is **undercooked**. It tastes terrible. 

The fish is **overcooked**. It's totally burned. 

114.3 COMMON PREFIXES

PREFIX	MEANING	SAMPLE SENTENCE
anti-	against	It's always safer to use an antibacterial handwash.
co-	together	Erika loves her job because her coworkers are so nice.
dis-	not	My parents disapprove of my career decisions.
ex-	former	Clara is an ex-soldier . She used to be in the army.
im-, in-, ir-	not	Unfortunately, most of my answers were incorrect .
inter-	between, among	Matteo's band had become an international success.
mid-	middle	Jo's essay got a low grade because it finished mid-sentence .
mis-	wrongly	I think the referee misjudged the situation.
non-	not	I don't like this book at all. The plot is complete nonsense .
out-	better than others	Yue's work is fantastic. She's outperforming everyone.
over-	too much	It's okay to work hard, but make sure you don't overdo it.
post-	after	New mothers should receive good postnatal care.
pre-	before	The experiment will go ahead at a prearranged time.
re-	again	If you don't get into the school, you could reapply next year.
self-	oneself	Ronda can be a little bit too self-confident sometimes.
sub-	under	Mark's work this year has been substandard .
super-, sur-	above, over	There's a small surcharge if you want to use a credit card.
un-	reverse, cancel, not	Stacy couldn't find the right key to unlock the safe.
under-	beneath, below	I think the waiter has undercharged us for this meal.

115 Suffixes

Suffixes are small groups of letters which can be added to the end of many words to give them different meanings.

See also:

Types of verbs 49

Singular and plural nouns 69 Adjectives 92

115.1 SUFFIXES

Suffixes attach to the end of a word to change its meaning. Suffixes usually give the same change in meaning to each word they attach to.

-able = possible to be

It's useful to set yourself **achievable** targets at work.



-ful = full of

The principal was so pleased that the play was **successful**.



-ist = someone who

My friend Jamie is the best **artist** I know.



-less = without

I don't like the food in the cafeteria. It is **tasteless**.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

Hugo is very funny and kind. He's a really **likeable** guy.



I can paint the house in a day. It's definitely **doable**.



Sarah is a **violinist**. She plays in her local orchestra.



Now that I've passed my exams, I am **hopeful** for the future.



What a boring lecture. Being there was **pointless**.



I am a **perfectionist**. My work takes me a long time.



115.2 USING SUFFIXES

Some words can take more than one kind of suffix to give different meanings.

The best jokes are in good **taste**.



That joke was hilarious. It was very **tasteful**.



That joke was offensive. It was very **tasteless**.



115.3 COMMON SUFFIXES

SUFFIX	MEANING	SAMPLE SENTENCE
-able, -ible	able to be	It is perfectly acceptable to submit your essays online.
-al, -ial	having characteristics of	The verdict was based entirely on circumstantial evidence.
-ance, -ence	state of	Male lions fight each other to assert their dominance .
-ate	become	You need to activate your credit card before you can use it.
-dom	place or state of being	Older children can be given a greater amount of freedom .
-en	become	They are planning to widen the roads to reduce congestion.
-er, -or	person who performs an action	Shakespeare is probably the most famous English writer .
-ful	full of	The computer is one of the most useful inventions ever.
-ic, -tic, -ical	having characteristics of	Running is a great form of physical exercise.
-ism	an action, state, or system	Surrealism was a major art movement of the 20th century.
-ist, -ian	someone who plays or does	A pianist is somebody who can play the piano.
-ity, -ty	quality of	Equality is the belief that everybody should be equal.
-ize	make	I'm trying to maximize our profits by selling more stock.
-less	without	The possibilities of technology are limitless .
-ment	condition of, act of	Buying property can be a very good investment .
-ness	state of	Lots of people today are interested in health and fitness .
-ous	having qualities of	The inland taipan is the most venomous snake in the world.
-sion, -tion	state of being or act of	All essays should end with a good conclusion .
-y	characterized by	The weather's terrible today. It's very cloudy outside.

115.4 SUFFIXES CHANGING WORD CLASS

Certain suffixes are only used for specific types of words. The suffix of a word can sometimes show what part of speech the word is.

ADJECTIVES



-able, -ible

comfortable
manageable
sensible

-al, -ial

accidental
controversial
seasonal

-en

golden
wooden
woolen

-ful

powerful
useful
wonderful

-ic, -tic, -ical

historic
poetic
radical

-less

harmless
powerless
tasteless

-ous

continuous
famous
outrageous

-y

cloudy
funny
stormy

NOUNS



-acy

conspiracy
diplomacy
literacy

-al

accusal
betrayal
denial

-ance, -ence

competence
defiance
dominance

-ant, -ent

accountant
defendant
student

-ism

capitalism
modernism
realism

-ist

optimist
pessimist
pianist

-ity, -ty

equality
royalty
society

-ment

employment
entertainment
government

VERBS



-ate

activate
debate
inflate

-en

brighten
sweeten
widen

-ify

classify
mystify
simplify

-ize

energize
immunize
minimize

-dom

freedom
kingdom
wisdom

-er, -or

generator
singer
writer

-ness

happiness
sadness
sickness

-sion, -tion

appreciation
collision
infection

115.5 SUFFIX SPELLING RULES

If the suffix starts with a vowel, and the root ends with a stressed final syllable ending consonant-vowel-consonant, the last letter of the root is doubled before adding the suffix.

occur

occurrence

If the suffix starts with a vowel and the root ends with an "e," the final "e" is dropped from the root before adding the suffix.

Roots ending "-ge" or "-ce" are an exception.

Root ends with "ge."

debate

debatable

manage

manageable

The "e" stays in the word.

If the root ends consonant plus "y," the "y" changes to an "i" before any suffix is added.

The exception is "-ing."

plenty

plentiful

apply

applying

"y" doesn't change before "-ing."

If the root ends vowel plus "y," the final "y" does not change.

Root ends vowel plus "y."

employ

employable

The "y" does not change to an "i."